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## **The Doctrine of Election in Reformed Perspective**

Historical and Theological Investigations  
of the Synod of Dordt 1618–1619

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Henk van den Belt

## Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Reformed Orthodox Doctrine of Predestination

I have deliberately refrained from drawing any quotations and justifications from the Synod of Dordrecht. This I have done for in this confession there are really harsh statements that, rather than clarifying the matter in itself only obscure it, and that arose only on account of the fact that people there engaged with vacuous skill for disputation questions that were not derived from a clear perception of the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Exactly two hundred years after the Synod of Dort one of the leading theologians in Germany, Friedrich Schleiermacher, expresses this negative view of the Synod. Schleiermacher based his *On the Doctrine of Election*, a defense of the Reformed doctrine of election over against some Lutheran misrepresentations exclusively on John Calvin's *Institutes*, because they were entirely free from the empty *Disputirkunst* that characterized the theology of the Canons of Dort. This makes one curious why this theological giant is so negative about the later Reformed theology and places Calvin against the Calvinists.

Schleiermacher's doctrine of election has recently been the object of scholarly research. This research understandingly focusses on Schleiermacher's relationship to John Calvin, on the theological context of the union of Lutheran and Reformed churches, or compares Schleiermacher's view with that of Karl Barth.<sup>2</sup> Not much research, however, has been done on Schleiermacher's assessment of Reformed Orthodoxy, the Post-Reformation Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This paper intends to analyze the relationship between the nineteenth century theologian and the orthodox Reformed doctrine of predestination.

The source for this analysis is Schleiermacher's essay *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung; besonders in Beziehung auf Herrn Dr. Bretschneiders Aphorismen* (1819). Given the fact that Schleiermacher expressly mentions the Synod of Dort

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<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher: 2012, 97. Henceforth only the page numbers of the English translation of *On the Doctrine of Election* will be mentioned. For the German original of *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* see Schleiermacher: 1990.

<sup>2</sup> For some examples see Gockel: 2007; Hagan: 2014; Herms: 2009; and McDonald: 2012.

this paper will compare his position with the Leiden *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625), which articulates the Reformed theology of the Synod and contains a specific disputation on predestination (Van den Belt: 2016). It will assess Schleiermacher's view of Reformed Orthodoxy from the two angles of the relationship of election and foreseen faith and the place of election in the theological system.

## 1. Über die Lehre von der Erwählung

In his response to the Lutheran theologian Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1776–1848), Schleiermacher clearly shows that the Calvinian theory of election, as he calls it, flows consistently from the reformational principle of *sola gratia*, or as he emphasizes from “the complete incapacity of human beings to better themselves” (24). He agrees with Bretschneider that one has either to accept or reject both. His Lutheran opponent opts for the rejection and Schleiermacher for the acceptance.

In his essay Schleiermacher proves that it is inconsistent to advocate “the anti-Pelagian Augsburg Confession as the safeguard of the Lutheran church but reject out of hand Calvin's strict view of gracious election as a dangerous doctrine which can never be accepted” (26).

The historical context of Bretschneider's *Aphorismen über die Union der beiden evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland, ihre gemeinschaftliche Abendmahlsfeier, und den Unterschied ihrer Lehre* and Schleiermacher's response in his *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* lies in the Prussian union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches effected by Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia (1770–1840). Though both theologians advocated the union, their views of the way in which the theological controversies should be solved, differed completely.

Bretschneider argued that the Lutherans in general had drawn closer to a Reformed understanding of the Lord's Supper by distancing themselves from the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist and that the Reformed in general had already abandoned the doctrine of predestination (Bretschneider: 1819, VI). Completely in line with the Enlightenment's emphasis on human responsibility he proposed that both sides forget about the Lutheran and Reformed presupposition of the *servum arbitrium* and accept human freedom as a basis of true religion. Human beings must be able to effect their salvation by making the right choices and the Reformed doctrine of grace ultimately make ethics meaningless, “by destroying the moral nature of human beings” (Bretschneider: 1819, VI). His concept was in complete agreement with the view of Immanuel Kant that the natural religion rests in the human capacity for moral improvement (Cf. Herms: 2009, 220).

To understand the context of Schleiermacher's remarks on Reformed Orthodoxy a very short summary of his *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* might be helpful. In the first place he argues that the Lutheran concept of predestination grounded on foreseen faith does not differ from the Reformed view, provided that the faith God foresees is exclusively understood as a gift or work of God. Something foreseen by God is always also something ordained by God, if you trace it back far enough.

It is important for the understanding of Schleiermacher's view of Reformed Orthodoxy that he does not make a clear distinction between God's foreknowledge and God's will. This opinion seems to flow from his understanding of the way in which God's eternal decree unfolds in the process of history.

After proving that foreknowledge implies predestination Schleiermacher addresses four Lutheran objections against the implications of the Reformed view. 1) The objection that it is harmful for true piety is not correct because Calvin's concept presupposes the union with Christ and the renewal of the Spirit. 2) The objection that it contradicts moral freedom is at least as true for the Lutheran position. 3) The many exhortations in Scripture do not contradict the Reformed view, for these incitements lead to the acknowledgement of one's own inability and to the desire for their fulfillment. 4) Finally, he counters the main objection that the Reformed view of predestination conflicts with the universality of God's redemptive will by showing that this is in fact only a difference in expression “the one church says that some will not be saved because God did not will to grant them faith whereas the other church says that some will not be saved because God foresaw that they would not accept faith” (51). And there is no real difference between these positions, because foreknowledge implies predestination.

In his further analysis he expresses his feeling that the main reason for the Lutheran rejection of the Reformed doctrine of predestination might be the understandable hesitance to ground the damnation of certain people immediately in the will of God. This can be solved by distinguishing between the antecedent and consequent will of God – that is the antecedent general will to save all and the consequent will to save the believers – or by asserting that the will of God only pertains to those who are elected and not to the lost. Schleiermacher rejects these solutions because they either contradict the unity of God or lead to a Manichean limitation of the will of God and of God himself.

At the end of the booklet *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* Schleiermacher offers his own view, which he later unfolds in *Der christliche Glaube*. The most important renewal of the Reformed concept of election lies in Schleiermacher's conviction that election and rejection are part of one single divine decree. Election and rejection do not apply to two groups of human beings, but “the election and rejection of individuals are simply the two contrasted yet in each

instance correlated aspects of one and the same decree, whereby through divine power, yet in a natural way, the human race is to be transformed into the spiritual body of Christ" (75–76). This divine decree unfolds historically along with the spread of the Word of God by the church. Those who are grasped by the power of the gospel apparently are elect and those who are not yet grasped by it may be called reprobate.

In his *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* Schleiermacher presents his position as very congenial with Calvin's theology. A close comparison of his views with Reformed Orthodoxy will prove helpful to assess his claim of continuity with Calvin.

## 2. The Scholastic Method

In his *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung* Schleiermacher refers to some Lutheran theologians like Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), but does not engage explicitly with any representative of Reformed Orthodoxy, citing exclusively from John Calvin's *Institutes*. The same is true in his paragraphs on election in the *Christliche Glaube*.<sup>3</sup> Schleiermacher does, however, refer to the representatives of Reformed Orthodoxy more implicitly.

At the very beginning of his essay he compares Calvin with the later Reformed theologians that defended him against Arminianism (22). Schleiermacher makes an insightful comparison between Augustine's medieval follower Gottschalk of Orbais (c. 804–869) and the contra-Remonstrants, the Dutch opponents of the Arminians.

The English translation is a not completely correct here, because Schleiermacher does not claim that the contra-Remonstrants at the synod of Dordrecht were inspired by Gottschalk, but that they differed as much from Calvin as Gottschalk from Augustine: "Und eben so wenig als Gottschalk Augustinus war, waren auch die späteren Vertheidiger des Calvin gegen die remonstrantischen Angriffe ganz nur von ihm begeistert." / "Just as little as Gottschalk was Augustine, were the later defendants of Calvin against the remonstrant attacks, inspired exclusively by him" (Schleiermacher: 1990, 149).<sup>4</sup>

Schleiermacher does not make clear in which sense the Reformed Orthodox theologians resemble Gottschalk. The Synod of Chiersy (849) charged Gottschalk

3 "It is instructive to note that, apart from John Calvin (1509–1564), individual Reformed theologians find no mention either in Schleiermacher's essay or in the relevant propositions of Christian Faith." Hagan: 2014, 72.

4 The translation says "Moreover, Gottschalk was no more an Augustine than were the later defenders of Calvin against the attacks of the Arminians, who were inspired by none other than Gottschalk himself" (22).

with heresy because of teaching *gemina praedestinatio*, an understanding of predestination in which election and reprobation run parallel. The major difference with Augustine lies in the fact that Gottschalk explicitly teaches that those who are not elect are predestined to a just condemnation, only because God willed so. The number of the non-elect is specified by predestination to death, which runs parallel to the election to life. In his *Shorter Confession* he says:

I believe and confess that the omnipotent and immutable God has gratuitously fore-known and predestined the holy angels and elect human beings to eternal life, and that he equally predestined the devil himself, the head of all the demons, with all of his apostate angels and also with all reprobate human beings, namely, his members, to rightly eternal death, on account of their own future, most certainly foreknown evil merits, through his most righteous judgment. (Genke and Gumerlock: 2010, 71)

It is difficult to decide which aspects of Gottschalk's theology Schleiermacher had in mind, but most likely he is referring to the way in which election and reprobation run parallel and to the implication of limited atonement. These are the elements Schleiermacher mentions in his discussion of Gottschalk's doctrine of predestination in the *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche* (Schleiermacher and Bonnell: 1840, 406–413). He also claims that Gottschalk and of the Reformed Orthodox used 'less pure sources' and might be thinking of a philosophical understanding of God's immutability, or more in general of Greek philosophy in the first case and of scholasticism in the second case.

It is interesting that Schleiermacher presents his own view on election as a fourth attempt to formulate the doctrine. It is clear that the first and second attempts are those of Augustine and Calvin with which he agrees. It is not so clear, however, what the third attempt – that replaced the second – exactly is. Possibly Schleiermacher is referring to the Lutheran rejection of predestination and the Reformed adherence to it that presented only negations and restrictions and was a product of controversy (23).

Later on the essay is more explicit about the faults of the Reformed Orthodox. Following the already quoted statement that there is no real difference between the Reformed position that some are not saved because God did not want to grant them faith and the Lutheran position that some are not saved because God foresaw that they would not accept faith, Schleiermacher blames the followers of Calvin of having been driven to make negative statements that they did not have to make, "this has to be attributed not to the doctrine but to its clumsy defense" (51).

When he discusses the Lutheran objection that the Augustinian and Calvinian concept of election implies arbitrariness in God, Schleiermacher again distinguishes between Calvin and the Calvinists. The *decretum absolutum* cannot be found in the *Institutes* but first arose from controversy; even the Reformed

*Confession of Sigismund* (1614) – to which Schleiermacher had subscribed (96 n146) – rejects this expression (60). He refers to the *Institutes* 1.17.2 where Calvin rejects the medieval scholastic concept of a *voluntas absoluta* in which God's justice is separated from his power and insists on the fact that God's providence is the determining principle of all things, although the reasons remain hidden from us.

Again, it is not clear who of the later Reformed theologians Schleiermacher blames for using this misleading term, but he seems to suggest that in the development of Reformed Orthodoxy the Calvinian doctrine of election became distorted by the explicit formulation of a decree of reprobation and the implication of the restriction of God's redemptive will and the atonement of Christ to the elect. This development implies an unacceptable arbitrariness in God's election. At least Schleiermacher later explains that "this appearance of blind arbitrariness against which Calvin so urgently and earnestly protests, largely arose from that scholastic method, which raised specific questions torn out of context" (65). According to Schleiermacher, this method distorts the real pre-suppositions of the Calvinian doctrine and makes the questions that this doctrine evokes irresolvable:

This method has introduced well-nigh impenetrable confusion into almost every important point in the Christian body of doctrine. Together with all that it has produced this scholastic method cannot be banished too strongly, for the purpose that this era, along with the superficial resistance to it, can finally be closed and a new treatment of faith-doctrine developed that leaves no room for such questions but completely rejects them (65–66).

It is very clear from all these remarks and from the negative view of the *Canons of Dort* with its harsh statements and empty *Disputirkunst* – demonstrated in the opening quotation of this article – that Schleiermacher prefers Calvin above the Calvinists. His negative attitude towards Reformed Orthodoxy in general appears in remarks like "nothing but an utterly dead scholasticism could [...] wish to represent the written word in its bare externality as a special product of inspiration" (Schleiermacher: 1999, 600) and "dogmatics are to be ever more completely purged of scholasticism" (Schleiermacher: 1999, 396). He views Reformed Orthodox theology as a dangerous deviation from its origins and wants to get rid of the scholastic method altogether. Still the question remains unanswered how his negative view can be explained and how it relates to the Reformed Orthodox sources.

### 3. Reformed Orthodoxy on Election and Foreseen Faith

The reason why Schleiermacher was so negative about the theology of Reformed Orthodoxy might partly lie in the specific historical context of the union of the churches. Schleiermacher intended to demonstrate that the Lutheran position implies a Calvinian view of election, even if the Lutherans advocated election from foreseen faith and rejected reprobation.

The Synod of Dort, however, explicitly rejected the Arminian concept of foreseen faith as a basis of election and also explicitly formulated a decree of reprobation. This was not very useful for the goal Schleiermacher had set for himself, namely to prove that there is no inconsistency between the Lutheran and the Reformed positions. After defining election, the Canons for instance state that Scripture underlines the undeserved grace of God

when it further declares that not all men are elect but that some have not been elected, or have been passed by in the eternal election of God. [...] These, having been left in their own ways and under His just judgment, God has decreed finally to condemn and punish eternally, not only on account of their unbelief but also on account of all their other sins, in order to display His justice. This is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought is blasphemous!), but rather declares Him to be its awesome, blameless, and just judge and avenger (*Canons of Dort* 1.15).<sup>5</sup>

Although election and reprobation are not placed side by side, but reprobation is understood as the inevitable consequence of election and the twofold ultimate destination of sinners, either being saved by grace alone or being left alone in their sins, still the Canons do teach a double predestination and an explicit decree of reprobation. It is an intriguing fact however, that there is no difference here with similar statements in Calvin's *Institutes*. Take for instance his remark that God condemns those whom He passes over "for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children" (Calvin, *Institutes* 3.23.1, Battles: 1960, 947). Schleiermacher can hardly have overlooked this similarity between Calvin and Dordrecht, although he might have had some difficulties with the explicit reference in the phrase in the *Canons of Dort* "hoc est decretum reprobationis".

Regarding foreseen faith the *Canons* also explicitly state that election is "not based on foreseen faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality of disposition, as a cause or condition in man required for being chosen, but men are chosen to faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, and so on" (*Canons of Dort* 1.9). This statement rather underlines Schleiermacher's own view that God's

<sup>5</sup> The quotations from the *Canons of Dort* follow the translation of the Canadian & American Reformed Churches, [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org).

foreknowledge implies predestination, provided that the foreseen faith is not understood as an independent act of free will, but as a gift of God.

In the synod's refutation of errors the emphasis is also on the meritory character of foreseen faith according to the Arminians. Their position is summarized as teaching that election occurs because of foreseen perseverance in faith and that "the person who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not chosen. Therefore faith, obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are [...] necessary conditions and causes required and foreseen as accomplished in those who are to be fully elected" (*Canons of Dort* 1, refutation 5). It should not have been too difficult for Schleiermacher to demonstrate that this rejection of foreseen faith is in harmony with his explanation of foreseen faith as a gift of God.

#### 4. The *Synopsis of Purer Theology* (1625)

If one turns to the theology behind the *Canons of Dort* the resemblance between Schleiermacher's Calvin and the Calvinists whom Schleiermacher rejects becomes even more apparent. In 1625, six years after the Synod of Dort (1618–19) the theological faculty of Leiden University published an important summary of Reformed theology, titled *Synopsis of Purer Theology*. The *Synopsis* had its origins in a series of public disputations that were held at Leiden from 1620–1624, and the arrangement of its chapters reflects the order of these disputations.<sup>6</sup>

De twenty-fourth disputation, titled *De praedestinatione* was defended under the presidency of Antonius Walaeus (1573–1639), who had been a delegate to the Synod of Dort on behalf of Zeeland. He was one of the new professors of theology the States of Holland and West-Friesland had appointed in the 1619 reforming of the university next to Johannes Polyander à Kerckhoven (1568–1646).

In the disputation on election Antonius Walaeus explicitly distinguishes reprobation from election. After eight introductory theses, the disputation discusses election in thirty-five theses and reprobation in the final eighteen theses. His discussion of the topic makes clear that he does not parallel the two sides of God's decree. Predestination can refer to both reprobation and election, but these categories are not synonymous in every respect, but only analogous (*Synopsis* 24.6). Here Walaeus takes up a scholastic distinction between a *genus univocum*, that he also calls a *genus synonymum*, the strict meaning of the word, and a *genus analogum* which has a broader sense. By this distinction Walaeus stresses that

<sup>6</sup> For an extensive introduction, see Sinnema/Van den Belt: 2012. The first two of the three volumes of the bilingual Latin and English text have been published (Te Velde, 2014 and Van den Belt, 2016). The references in the main text refer to the numbers of the disputations and the theses.

election and reprobation are dissimilar. Reprobation is an act of God, but not everything pertaining to reprobation stems directly from reprobation (*Synopsis* 24.6).

In the theses on reprobation Walaeus explains this by a distinction between negative and affirmative reprobation or between 'passing over' and 'pre-damnation'. The first simply means that God did not elect all, "Affirmative reprobation, however, is the act whereby He resolved to impose the punishments finally deserved upon those same people who had been left, justly, in the lump of perdition, or who abuse the light of nature and of the Gospel in various ways by their own free choice" (*Synopsis* 24.50). Negative reprobation is the logical consequence of election and affirmative reprobation is the just judgment of God upon sinners. Still Walaeus does not want to make the distinction too strong, because the two acts are not really different "for from eternity God within himself has determined everything in one single act" (*Synopsis* 24.52). The distinction only refers to the various objects and aspects of the same decree.

This makes one curious how the Reformed Orthodox teaching with regard to the one act of God in election relates to Schleiermacher's own solution. Walaeus phrases this point in scholastic language, claiming that in the infinite act of divine wisdom there is no place for succession as in human beings.

But just as both the best goal and the most appropriate means to achieve it have, from eternity, been present simultaneously to God's all-comprehending knowledge of mere understanding, also before any decree, so also the divine wisdom and will simultaneously have chosen and ordained this goal and the means that are best suited to his mercy and justice, within that same eternity, without any deliberative or consultative process (*Synopsis* 24.20).

At least formally this comes very close to Schleiermacher's idea that election and reprobation belong to one and the same divine decree and that there is no real distinction between foreknowledge and predestination. The formal resemblance becomes even clearer when Walaeus' discussion of foreknowledge as basis of predestination is taken into account. Of course he rejects the Arminian understanding of foreknowledge, but compared to the *Canons* he sounds rather mild and nuanced. Some, he says, who want to belong to the Reformed church, are of the opinion "that God decisively elected only those whose faith and perseverance He foresaw, at least as a prior, prerequisite quality, and as a cause *sine qua non*." (*Synopsis* 24.34).

But this view turns election into a reward based on the fulfillment of conditions and thus contradicts doctrine of free grace. If the Arminians would only acknowledge that faith and perseverance are gifts of God, there would be no problem at all, according to Walaeus. The difference would then case only regard the order of the decree and the way one speaks about it.



In his philosophical treatise *Compendium ethicae Aristotelicae* Walaeus is even more explicit on the relationship between divine providence and foreknowledge. After having stated that only God has absolute freedom and that his providential rule over all our actions does not exclude that they are still made in liberty, because God's decree does not exclude but includes freedom and contingency, Walaeus remarks:

For everyone (unless they are even worse than Turks and pagans) acknowledges that God has had foreknowledge from eternity of the determination of the human will in all its actions. Can any human being understand how God has foreseen that something which is the effect of undetermined causes will definitely happen? Indeed, if anyone can explain to me how God, by the infinite light of his knowledge, has foreseen this without violating human liberty, I will by the same token explain to him how God decreed it from eternity by his supremely wise decree and executed it in time without violating human freedom. (Walaeus: 1620, II, 227, cf. Monfasani: 1997, 126).

Take as a final example what Walaeus writes on the will of God: "this will, however, is not absolute, as if it lacked a reason, nor is it a tyrannical will (even to use this word is blasphemy). Some interpret the term "absolute" in this manner, thereby trying to arouse hatred towards us." (*Synopsis* 24.58). God's will is absolute not in the sense that there is no reason for it, but in the sense of something that is independent, that exists in itself and thus is free. Walaeus refers to a similar quotation from Calvin's as Schleiermacher above: "Therefore, I not only reject but also detest the triflings of the Scholastics about absolute power, because they separate God's justice from his power." (*Synopsis* 24.60, cf. Calvin, *Responsio altera de occulta Dei providentia* CO 9, 288).

Indeed the supralapsarian Reformed theologians, like Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and James Arminius' opponent Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) did place election and reprobation more on one line than the infralapsarian theologian Antonius Walaeus. At the Synod of Dort (session 107) Gomarus responded to the speeches by Polyander, Thysius and Walaeus on the first article of the *Canons* by stating publicly that he agreed with everything except the object of predestination, which in his opinion should be not only the fallen human race (*hominem lapsum*) but also the human race before the fall (*ante lapsum*) (De Lind van Wijngaarden: 1891, 107).

Against the supralapsarians, who locate the decree concerning the decree of election (logically) 'before' the decree concerning the fall (so that the object of the decree concerns human beings who are not yet created or fallen), Walaeus maintains the infralapsarian position which holds that God in electing people views them as created and in the state of sin (such that the decree concerning election must be located "after" the decree concerning the fall).

Schleiermacher might be referring to these supralapsarian views when he blames the later defenders of Calvin of defining predestination as a *decretum*

*absolutum* and interpreting the doctrine as a matter of arbitrariness in God by depending on "a vacuous skill for disputation questions" that resulted in "really harsh statements" but these accusations certainly do not apply to the nuanced infalapsarian Reformed theology behind the *Canons of Dort*.

One might even claim that the Reformed Orthodox elaborated the doctrine of predestination more carefully than Calvin himself, whose expressions sometimes made him vulnerable for misinterpretation and for the later supralapsarian interpretation of predestination that prompted the Arminian reaction rejected by the Synod of Dort. Why would Schleiermacher blame Reformed Orthodox theology for a misrepresentation that Calvin himself was also vulnerable for? Most likely, for a formal reason, that is, because the later development was formulated in a more nuanced way making use of the scholastic method that Schleiermacher rejected.

## 5. Election in the Theological System

A second angle from which Schleiermacher's relationship to Reformed Orthodoxy can be assessed is from the place he gives to election in his theological system. Given the principles of his theology, it is not surprising that in *The Christian Faith* he discusses election in the context of the origin of the church "Von dem Entstehen der Kirche" (*The Christian Faith*, § 115–125).

The exact place of predestination in the theological system is an often discussed theological issue. This discussion is basically prompted by the rather unusual decision of John Calvin to move predestination from its customary alignment with providence to the context of pneumatology in the final edition of the *Institutes*.<sup>7</sup> The main issue in that discussion is whether predestination belongs in the context of the doctrine of God or in the context of soteriology. In the first case the doctrine is closely connected to creation and providence, while in the second case it is linked to saving faith as the work of the Holy Spirit. In general the first option is mostly ascribed to Reformed Orthodoxy while the latter is seen as the position of John Calvin, at least in the final edition of the *Institutes*. We will first turn to the placement of election in Schleiermacher's *Christliche Glaube* and then return to Calvin and the Reformed Orthodox to compare both positions.

Walter L. Moore sees a similarity between Calvin and Schleiermacher in the treatment of predestination within an ecclesiological context. "Many Reformed theologians had followed the arrangement of early editions of the *Institutes*, locating election within the doctrine of God. In making the shift Schleiermacher

<sup>7</sup> For the discussion about how this relates to the theological systems of Reformed Orthodoxy cf. Muller: 2005, 184.



is in agreement with Calvin's final position." According to Moore, Schleiermacher is faithful to the Reformer – and he implies more faithful than many Reformed theologians – by treating election "as the church's reflection upon its origin" (Moore: 1971, 173, cf. Partee: 2008, 319). Dawn DeVries and Brian A. Gerrish are of the opinion that the order of topics in a systematic theology is not indifferent: "the sense of a doctrine is, at least in part, a function of its location." They remark that Schleiermacher placed providence and justification conventionally, but "postponed election still further than Calvin, placing it under ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church" (DeVries and Gerrish: 2005, 189). Anette I. Hagan discusses the positioning of the doctrine in the sources Schleiermacher used and then concludes that "from the late eighteenth century onwards, predestination has been positioned either within or in the vicinity of Christology, and hence in a soteriological context" (Hagan, 2014, 95).

Schleiermacher might not be original preferring soteriology as the right place in his theological system to discuss election, his specific choice for ecclesiology and the way in which he elaborates on the doctrine in *The Christian Faith* is original. He places the four paragraphs on election and predestination (§§ 117–120) in the section regarding the "The Nature of the World in Relation to Redemption" (§§ 113–163) which he divides in three pieces: "On the Origin of the Church" (§§ 115–125), "On the Existence of the Church in Its Existing Together with the World" (§§ 126–156), and "On the Consummation of the Church" (§§ 157–163).

The church is the community of regenerate people but it is also the world as far as it is already redeemed. Schleiermacher first treats the origin of the church or the way in which it is formed when the regenerate individuals are gathered together. He subdivides the origin of the church in two parts: Election (§§ 117–120) and Communication of the Holy Spirit (§§ 121–122). The doctrine of election flows from the fact that all those living can never at the same time be included in the kingdom of God. It is not an insolvable problem that individuals are brought into this fellowship earlier or later – Schleiermacher's idea of election and temporary rejection – but it would be unbearable for the Christian sympathy if "on the assumption of survival after death, we are to think of a part of the human race as entirely excluded from this fellowship" (Schleiermacher: 1999, 539). Next Schleiermacher defines election as a divine predestination to salvation in Christ (§ 119) and finally he summarizes his argument on foreknowledge and predestination from the essay *On the Doctrine of Election* in the final paragraph (§ 120) of the discussion in *The Christian Faith*, titled "Election, considered as influencing the divine government of the world, is grounded in the faith of the elect, foreseen by God: viewed as rooted in the divine government of the world, it is solely determined solely by the divine good-pleasure" (Schleiermacher: 1999, 551).

Schleiermacher thus takes his point of departure in the acceptance of individuals in the body of the church and the fellowship with Christ at the moment they are justified in time. Given the fact that God gathers human beings into his kingdom and given the fact that this historical process takes time, not all people living at a certain time can be redeemed and become part of the church. It is important that election is understood by Schleiermacher as the first stage in the historical process of the formation of the church. Election is not that which God has decided from eternity, but that which God appears to decide along with the unfolding of the process of the gathering of the church.

Then Schleiermacher turns to the self-consciousness of the regenerate and here it becomes clear that Schleiermacher founds his whole system upon the experience of absolute dependence. The sanctified feeling of the Christian does not have to be uneasy about the fact that some join the church earlier and others later, provided that in the end all will be saved and the human race will not be split into a part that will exclusively possess salvation in the fellowship of God's kingdom and a part that will for always remain excluded from it. Therefore the Christian consciousness can recognize only one form of predestination namely the election to participation in the blessedness of Christ.

Although Schleiermacher places the doctrine of election in the context of ecclesiology – which as such is surprising given the traditional options in the doctrines of God and soteriology – election in the *Christliche Glaube* is determined by the historical development of the kingdom of God. Thus Schleiermacher's concept of election is dominated by providence, although he deals with that topic in the first book. Or, as DeVries and Gerrish explain, Schleiermacher's "thoughts on the relation of divine to natural causality in part one necessarily called, in part two, for some recasting of Christian beliefs about [...] the divine good pleasure that draws a line between the elect and the non-elect" (DeVries and Gerrish: 2005, 190). Thus although it is placed in the context of ecclesiology, his concept of election is still determined by providence.

Regarding the larger structure of his theology however, it is essential for his understanding of election that he founds his whole system in the experience of absolute dependence. This leads to his rejection of reprobation – or rather his reinterpretation of it as a temporal rejection – and to his universalism, resting upon the intuition that it is unbearable for the Christian sympathy that part of the human race would be lost forever because that would diminish the joy and happiness of those who are elect.

It is interesting to compare that to Calvin's switch in removing predestination in the final edition of the *Institutes* from the context of providence into the context of pneumatology. Richard Muller has argued that Calvin – who never explained the new placement of predestination explicitly – had a pedagogical intention with his choice. "In all of the editions prior to 1559, the chapter on

providence and predestination remained in roughly the same place – while in 1559 [...] not predestination but providence was moved” (Muller: 2005, 195). Regarding the content of his doctrine the connection between providence and predestination remains clear also after the shifting of 1559.

If we now once again turn to the *Synopsis* as one of the important sources for the understanding of Reformed Orthodoxy, it is remarkable that the place of predestination was not that fixed as many discussions of Reformed Orthodoxy seem to imply. The survey of Heppe, for instance, suggests that its normal place in Reformed Orthodoxy was in the context of the doctrine of God and in connection with predestination (Heppe: 1861, 110). This was then easily interpreted as a deviation from the view of Calvin in the final edition of the *Institutes*.

The series of disputations that resulted in the *Synopsis* continued an older tradition of cycles of theological disputations that began in 1596 (Van den Belt: 2015). Six cycles of disputations were held prior to the Synod of Dort, the first one of which was presided in 1596 and 1597 by Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Lucas Trelcatius Sr. (1542–1602), and Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641). The cycle opens with a disputation on *The Authority of Holy Scripture* and ends with the one on *The Magistrate*.<sup>8</sup> After this original cycle was completed, five repetitions (*repetitiones*) were held; the number of disputations and the topics in the later *repetitiones* vary from the original cycle and from each other.

In the original cycle the disputation on predestination follows immediately after the Trinity, Christology, and providence. This is in line with the general impression that Reformed Orthodoxy linked predestination with the doctrine of God. But in the *repetitiones* the disputation on predestination moves back and forth between the doctrine of God and soteriology and the last part of soteriology.

In the *Synopsis* the choice is interesting for two reasons. The authors do not connect predestination immediately with the doctrine of God or with providence, but with Christology. Before turning to Christ's incarnation, offices, humiliation and exaltation, the *Synopsis* first explains for whom Christ did all his work. Or, as the opening thesis of the disputation on the incarnation says, having treated predestination, “it follows that we should next give separate treatments of what is the object of the Gospel and the basis for the new covenant, namely, the person of Christ, or the incarnation of the Son of God, and the personal union of the two natures of Christ” (*Synopsis* 25.1).

The *Synopsis* places five disputations on the work of Christ between predestination (disputation 24) and the call (disputation 30). The disputations on the *vocatio* before the Synod of Dort often open with a reference to the previous disputation on predestination, defining the call as the execution of predestina-

tion. The disputations after the Synod of Dort – not only in the *Synopsis*-cycle, but also other disputations – however, prefer to speak of the call as the execution of election rather than as the execution of predestination (Van den Belt: 2012, 548).

Thus the influence of the discussions at the Synod of Dort seems to appear in two ways in the structure of the *Synopsis*: 1) the confessional decision to limit the atonement of Christ to the elect is mirrored in the fact that Christology is governed by predestination, and 2) the infralapsarian approach of predestination leads to a stronger differentiation of election and reprobation as two dissimilar sides of predestination. Soteriology starting with the divine call to salvation is the execution of the electing grace of God, whereas the just damnation of the sinners is a result of the implication of election and the twofold human final destination; that all will not be saved and therefore some are passed over in God's decree of election or thus reprobated.

Thus the view that Calvin consciously separated providence and predestination, that Reformed Orthodoxy deviated from Calvin by reconnecting the two and that Schleiermacher returned to the original Calvinian position, must be corrected from the sources. Although Calvin in his final edition of the *Institutes* seemingly disconnects predestination from providence, this hardly effects the theological interrelationship of the two. Although Schleiermacher places election in the context of ecclesiology it still is determined by his view of providence. On the other hand, although the Reformed orthodox sometimes discuss predestination in the context of the doctrine of God, their view of the theological relationship of the two doctrines is more nuanced, especially with those theologians that hold the infralapsarian view of predestination which was the leading position at the Synod of Dort.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The assessment of the relationship between Schleiermacher and Reformed Orthodoxy from the angles of election out of foreseen faith and of the place of election in the structure of the theological system, shows that Schleiermacher does not do justice to the nuanced way in which the Reformed heritage was elaborated on by the later generations of theologians who made use of the scholastic method.

His negative attitude might partly be explained from his passion for the unity of the Reformed and Lutheran churches for which the explicit formulation of reprobation and the explicit rejection of election out of foreseen faith in later

<sup>8</sup> For a complete list of the disputations see ‘Appendix A: List of the First Leiden Cycle of Theological Disputations’ (Sinnema/Van den Belt: 2012, 529).

Reformed theology was problematic.<sup>9</sup> But if he had taken better notice of the underlying theological writings, he would not have had to be so negative about Reformed Orthodoxy. Neither would he have had to suggest such a gap between Calvin and the Calvinists.

The most significant difference between Calvin and later Reformed theology seems to be that they used the classical scholastic method to explain some of the harsh sayings of Calvin by – for instance – differentiating between election and reprobation and arguing that divine providence does not imply the loss of human freedom as such. At least this is the case for the theologians at the Synod of Dort, as we have seen in the example of Walaeus. Schleiermacher, however, explicitly blames them of using harsh phrases and on the other hand systematizes Calvin's position from his own perspective.

The intention of the [Reformed] orthodox dogmaticians was to produce, not a modern, logically cohesive, system of theology on the pattern of Schleiermacher or Tillich, but a body of doctrine in which the topics of biblical teaching were gathered into a coherent and defensible whole for the sake of the life and salvation of the church. (Muller: 2003 IV, 392)

An essential difference between Schleiermacher and Calvin is that Schleiermacher approaches the theme of election from the perspective of history instead of from eternity and that he equates history with the unfolding of the divine decree. The consequence is that the difference between those who are elected and those who are rejected – because they are not yet elected – is a matter of time, of already and not yet, of being called sooner or later.

Although the position of Schleiermacher might not necessarily lead to universalism, this approach of election and rejection makes the step towards universalism very small. Or perhaps one can turn the whole argument around: the real reason for Schleiermacher's adaptation of the Calvinian and Reformed doctrine of election was his wish to get rid of the idea of eternal punishment. In his *Geschichte der christlichen Kirche* Schleiermacher states that the Augustinian discussion on predestination was reopened in the Reformation, but remained undecided "because of not willing to take leave from the concept of eternal damnation" (Schleiermacher and Bonnell: 1840, 414). That was exactly the point in which Schleiermacher wanted to transform the Augustinian and Calvinian traditions.

Schleiermacher's position comes closer to classical supralapsarian – be it in a universalistic form – than to the infralapsarian position<sup>10</sup>, and that makes his

negative comparison of the Reformed Orthodox defenders of Calvin with Augustine's pupil Gottschalk the more remarkable. Why does Schleiermacher blame others of an interpretation of Calvin that is rather similar to his own?

It is an interesting systematic theological question how Schleiermacher's assessment of the Reformed tradition should be evaluated in the light of his claim to maintain and renew that tradition. Compared with the nuanced assessment of the Augustinian and Reformational heritage in Reformed Orthodoxy Schleiermacher seems to over-systematize the heritage – a fault of which he blames the Reformed Orthodox – leading to a position that can easily be interpreted as deterministic or even as pantheistic. Because of his maintenance of human responsibility it might be better to speak of a pantheistic tendency in his theology.<sup>11</sup>

Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) states that in the nineteenth century the Pelagian deism of the Enlightenment was replaced by a pantheistic or materialistic determinism that was too easily equated with the doctrine of predestination and exchanged the divine decree for blind fate.

In principle, Schleiermacher also agrees with this viewpoint, for though he proceeds from the doctrine of the church and continues to hold onto the revelation in Christ he only distinguishes election and reprobation in relation to time. In the strict sense of the word there are no reprobates. (Bavinck: 2004, 370)

It is an interesting question for further research how Schleiermacher's systematic assessment of Calvin and his negative view of Reformed Orthodoxy relate to the dominant view in the nineteenth century that Calvin's theology was a predestinarian system and that the later Reformed Orthodox theology was primarily a further systematization of that single point. Schleiermacher's pupil, Alexander Schweizer (1808–1888) was instrumental for this perspective. He corrected his master's view of discontinuity between Calvin and the Calvinists, but interpreted the whole tradition from the idea of predestination as *Zentraldogma*.<sup>12</sup> While Calvin research in the twentieth century corrected this view for the Reformer, the later Calvinists remained stained as harsh predestinarians, while in fact many of them were more nuanced than Calvin himself.

original sinfulness of humankind. The result is a modified supralapsarianism and a rejection of the idea of an initial 'fall' of humankind." (Gockel: 2007, 100).

11 According to Cooper it is difficult to decide whether Schleiermacher holds a pantheistic or a panentheistic view of the God-world relation, but he concludes that Schleiermacher is best classified as a panentheist who is close to pantheism. (Cooper: 2006, 80, 88). Gockel, however, concludes that "The sharp distinction between God and the world demonstrates that Schleiermacher's theology is neither pantheistic, in the sense that it implies an identification of God and nature, nor panentheistic, as if the world somehow exists 'in God'" (Gockel: 2007, 48). Schleiermacher states that pantheism is compatible with piety, as long as it is not a materialistic negation of theism. (Schleiermacher: 1999, 39).

12 On Schweizer's reception of Reformed Orthodoxy, see Bachera: 2008.

9 According to Paul Thorsell Schleiermacher criticized the Canons of Dordrecht because they did not fit his aim to unify the Prussian church" Thorsell: 2016.

10 According to Gockel, Schleiermacher suggests that "God orders sin not in itself but in relation to the one divine decree of redemption, which encompasses the original perfection and the

It remains an astonishing fact that the once so celebrated Reformed Orthodox theology came into such discredit within two hundred years, that a theological giant like Schleiermacher suggests to banish it altogether and hardly bothered to take notice of the sources.

Again two hundred years later, the theology of Reformed Orthodoxy is regaining interest. Provided that it is not merely copied, but interpreted within the historical context of Christian Aristotelianism and its scholastic method, this theology can and should be understood as an expression the catholic Christian faith. It deserves a fair treatment instead of a complete banishment.

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